

A brief report with departmental and institutional changes at UVT on research management and structure based on the project's results

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under **Grant Agreement No. 952464**

Deliverable number: D3.4

Due date: 30.09.2023

Dissemination Level: Public

Work Package: WP3

Lead Beneficiary: West University of Timișoara

The current document is based on:

- The audit of research at UVT (West University of Timisoara), as documented by the experts from UNIMIB and UGENT involved in the analysis;
- The existing status quo at West University of Timisoara at the end of the LEARNVUL project (Sep 30, 2023) that includes subsequent changes in the university policies or measures

Simply put, we will start by presenting the suggestions that were made by the audit team based on the UVT status quo at the beginning of Work Package 3; and we will present in parallel which suggestions have been implemented today (the status quo at Sep 30, 2023)

To have a better view on these aspects, we present them as a table with two main columns

Suggestions made	Follow-up (UVT today)
<p>PhD level measures</p> <p><i>Reducing the teaching load of PhD students</i> Currently, all Ph.D. students who receive a scholarship (insufficient to cover their basic needs like housing or daily stipend) are required to teach many classes</p> <p><i>Technical support</i> PhD students in technical areas will benefit from the existence of a technician (i.e., for instance, who can install eye-tracking equipment to program an experiment in Inquisit, etc.)</p> <p><i>More office and research space</i> PhD students, and staff, in general, needs more co-working spaces to elaborate their research.</p>	<p>PhD level measures</p> <p>No significant change, under analysis The current discussion would be to provide more flexibility in terms of the number of hours of teaching as a compulsory requirement and to provide an alternative. For instance, PhD students could either teach those hours or compensate with additional research work that is finalized through additional articles or reviews in Web of Science (beyond the minimum required for finishing their PhD thesis).</p> <p>No significant change, less feasible suggestion UVT is open to the idea of hiring technicians, but as a public institution, it has restrictions in terms of number of people to hire and to their payment. It is unlikely to find people with high technical skills to come under a net entry-level salary of 600 euros at most, when industry provides more than 1000 euros as an entry level position for those with good technical skills.</p> <p>Implemented / Under implementation Two new buildings (one that also include major investments in research infrastructure have been build recently). They include several rooms (10+) that could be used for research purposes as well.</p>
<p>Post-doctoral level measures</p> <p><i>Attracting more postdocs</i> Relying more on postdocs and extending the number of attracted postdocs</p>	<p>Implemented / Under implementation The University has implemented an internally funded postdoc program in which we cover 15 internal grants per year of around 20.000 euros</p>

	<p>per year per postdoc, for a maximum of 2-year program. This covers the scholarship (1000 euros net – higher than the average salary on the market) and some additional moneys for traveling or logistics. They also work closely with a supervisor from the faculty members.</p>
<p>Faculty level measures <i>Attracting new academic staff</i> The existing staff is insufficient to cover properly all activities, as the number of vacant positions that needs to be filled with temporarily contracts range between 10% and 50%. This situation puts a burden on current employees, in addition to the existing national regulations that requires a significant number of teaching hours as a minimum. Therefore, the existing workload of current employees is rather high, considering the significant number of teaching hours each faculty member needs to provide (up to 12 hours per week for teaching assistants and lecturers, usually 4 to 6 hours per week for professors and associate professors). These values do not include temporarily contracts to cover the courses included in the vacant positions.</p> <p><i>Increasing the number of programs taught in English</i> Currently, there is a language barrier for faculty candidates outside Romania as most programs are taught in Romanian, which is not an international language. To open the job market to teachers from abroad more programs that are taught in English are needed.</p>	<p>Implemented / under implementation UVT has implemented a Start Grant meant to attract new faculty members. Each new person that is employed could receive a bonus (like an instalment bonus) that is provided in the next 12 months (which could be extended for another 12 months), and which give the opportunity to new employee to double their salary in exchange for attending a number of compulsory courses that belong to their continuous education. While the measure could last only for 12-24 months, it constitute a good way to attract both entry-level, and more experienced academics to UVT.</p> <p>Implemented / under implementation UVT encourages the occurrence of new bachelor and master programs in English and provides support for their existence, by allocating free tuition to a significant number of students who attend a program in English rather than in Romanian. For instance, Psychology Department has already implemented this suggestion, so that starting from Oct 1, 2023, there is a new English bachelor program on Psychology & Cognitive Sciences.</p>
<p>Faculty level measures Existing staff</p> <p><i>Being more flexible with the amount of teaching</i> Another suggestion was to increase the flexibility in terms of teaching hours, so that people who are involved in research could teach less, and those who do not perform in research to teach more.</p>	<p>Not implemented After careful analysis, this measure will not be implemented because: (a) there is a positive correlation between the quality of teaching and research performance, so that reducing the number of teaching hours for good researchers might also decrease the overall quality of teaching; (b) because of the financing system,</p>

Faculty Support Centre

In some places such as UGENT, faculty members could benefit from proper supervision. For instance, they could interact with personnel who was hired to assist them in conducting complex statistical analyses, or they count on the support of more experienced researchers who can provide their feedback on some grant writing drafts etc.

Reforming faculty assessment in line with CoARA

The publish or perish culture has created some monsters, such as an increased number of submissions to predatory or quasi-predatory gold open access journals, the high focus on the journal impact factor, the salami practice, low transparency / reduced methodological rigor.

Research mindset

Currently, the experts view who did the research audit concluded that research is not seen as a priority, but as something that needs to be done after other priorities (teaching & administration) have been fulfilled. What is

as people who do research in Romania are less interested to *buy time* (find teaching replacement) as they prefer to earn extra money (an extra salary for their work in a given grant).

Partially implemented

UVT has recently managed to attract some funds to set up a new Counselling Centre for Researchers, which will assist young academics and Ph.D. students, mainly, to get by their role. This includes psychological counselling, mentorship activities provided by more experienced researchers, and some additional training courses. However, there is no high technical assistance, as such people are difficult to be found and less likely to accept a modest salary (set by various country-level regulations). Likewise, the university has introduced a 1000 euro / person / year fund (Develop Funds) to help interested employees developing their skills (i.e., by selecting an online course on advanced data analysis).

Undergoing implementation

The UVT has signed the CoARA statement and joint the alliance. In this regard, the university has adopted a moderated position. Relying solely on journal impact factors is harmful, but an opposite view of entirely disregarding this aspect is also not appropriate. The idea would be to put more emphasis on methodological rigor such as pre-registration of studies, making databases available for third-party analysis etc. The commission in charge with reforming the employee assessment method will consider these new developments, and will find ways to incentivize publications that are in line with reproducibility, and transparency criteria. This measure will increase the number of pre-registered studies and FAIR data and will increase the methodological rigor of the research conducted at UVT.

An ongoing mission to be implemented

The need for a research mindset was the most astonishing observation made by the experts involved in the research audit. Indeed, if we consider the reality (people put a lot on emphasis on scheduling their teaching

needed is a shift in mindset so that research is also seen as a priority so that more attention is given to finding opportunities to reduce the time and effort spent on education and administration.

classes, on scheduling meeting hours with students, on departmental meetings, and other administrative meetings, and they do not schedule any formal time for doing research, excepting for potentially lab meetings, if any. A good solution would be to formally dedicate at least two days of the academic time for research activities. But this is more a life/work changing principle than a matter that can be solved by implementing formal research hours in the schedule. It is a complex issue that mixes mentalities with organizational culture.

To conclude, departmental and institutional changes based on this project are less in terms of developing new management structures (except for the new counseling center for researchers), but more in terms of policy changes: (i) in the direction of attracting new faculty members (Start Grants, new programs in English; enhancing the postdoctoral program); (ii) and improving some research conditions for the existing faculty (i.e., more offices and spaces dedicated for research; adjusting the assessment process regarding research by including some CoARA principles). There are some undergoing analyses regarding Ph.D. students and faculty members towards a new research-teaching-administrative balance, but these would require a shift in the research mindset, as a priority, and not as something left to be done after teaching and administration. This is a long and daunting journey, that UVT is willing to take.